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SUBJECT: ITALIAN DEFMIN'S COMMENTS SPARK ANOTHER ROUND OF
"EURO-SKEPTICISM" CHARGES

1. ITALIAN DEFENSE MINISTER ANTONIO MARTINO REVIVED
OPPOSITION PARTY ACCUSATIONS THAT HE IS A "EURO-SKEPTIC" BY
SUGGESTING THAT THE EU HAD RUSHED INTO CREATING ITS OWN
MILITARY IDENTITY WITHOUT THINKING IT THROUGH. THE NUMBER OF
TASKS APPROPRIATE FOR THE EU'S RAPID REACTION FORCE (RRF)
SHOULD BE REDUCED TO "VERY FEW," MARTINO TOLD THE BRITISH
"DAILY TELEGRAPH" IN A FEBRUARY 21 INTERVIEW. NATO HAS
PROVEN TO BE THE BEST VEHICLE TO PERFORM MULTINATIONAL
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OPERATIONS OF BOTH AN OFFENSIVE AND PEACE-KEEPING NATURE,
MARTINO SAID. IT HAS A COMMAND AND CONTROL STRUCTURE THAT
WORKS -- SOMETHING THE RRF LACKS AT THIS POINT. "NATO
WORKS," MARTINO STATED, ADDING, "IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX
IT."

2. MARTINO ASKED THE SPANISH EU PRESIDENCY TO CALL A MEETING
OF EU DEFENSE MINISTERS TO RE-EXAMINE THE SCOPE OF THE
PETERSBURG TASKS AND DECIDE WHICH ONES ARE FEASIBLE FOR THE
RRF, ACCORDING TO THE INTERVIEW AND OTHER PRESS REPORTS.
MARTINO PREDICTED THAT THERE WOULD NOT BE MANY MISSIONS THE
RRF COULD CARRY OUT WITHOUT THERE BEING SOME DISAGREEMENT
AMONG THE EU MEMBERS. HE CAUTIONED AGAINST CREATING
"DIVISIVE SITUATIONS" AMONG MEMBERS.

3. ITALY'S CENTER-LEFT OPPOSITION QUICKLY JUMPED ON MARTINO'S
STATEMENTS AS ANOTHER SIGN OF HIS -- AND THE BERLUSCONI
ADMINISTRATION'S -- EURO-SKEPTICISM. COMING NOT LONG AFTER
HIS PUBLIC DOUBTS ABOUT THE WISDOM OF A SINGLE EUROPEAN
CURRENCY AND HIS VOCAL REFUSAL TO SUPPORT ITALY'S
PARTICIPATION IN THE AIRBUS A400M MILITARY TRANSPORT PLANE,
MARTINO'S COMMENTS ADD MORE FUEL TO THE FIRE. GIOVANNI
FORCIERI, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND
OPPOSITION MEMBER, SAID MARTINO'S STATEMENTS WERE "SERIOUS"
AND NOT USEFUL TO THE US OR NATO. GIUSEPPE MOLINARI,
OPPOSITION LEADER ON THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES' DEFENSE
COMMITTEE, CHARGED THAT ITALY IS BECOMING "FLATTENED OUT ON
DEVOTIONAL ATLANTICISM," AND CALLED FOR MARTINO TO APPEAR
BEFORE PARLIAMENT. CENTER-LEFT PARTY LEADER PIERO FASSINO
NOTED THAT BERLUSCONI CLAIMED TO BE DEFENDING ITALY'S
NATIONAL INTERESTS, WHICH FASSINO SAID USED TO MEAN BEING A
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PART OF EUROPE. OPPOSITION MEMBERS ALSO OBJECTED TO
MARTINO'S REQUEST FOR AN EU DEFMIN MEETING WITHOUT FIRST
HAVING CONSULTED WITH PARLIAMENT.

4. COMMENT. MARTINO'S COMMENTS ON THE RRF ARE FURTHER
EVIDENCE THAT HE IS LESS DOGMATIC ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE
"PRO-EU" THAN MANY ITALIANS, PARTICULARLY THOSE IN THE
OPPOSITION. HE IS AN ADVOCATE FOR EUROPEAN MILITARIES WITH
RESTRUCTURED ARMED FORCES AND BETTER ARMAMENTS TO MEET GLOBAL
SECURITY NEEDS, AND ARGUES THAT IF EUROPEANS HAD ALLOTTED
MORE FUNDS FOR DEFENSE OVER THE YEARS, EUROPE WOULD HAVE
GREATER INFLUENCE IN WASHINGTON. HE IS NOT THE ONLY MINISTER
WILLING TO TAKE A PRACTICAL, AND OFTEN CONTROVERSIAL, LOOK AT
EU INSTITUTIONS, BUT HIS RRF COMMENTS MAY BE A LITTLE OUT IN
FRONT OF HIS PRIME MINISTER'S POSITION. IN A RECENT
INTERVIEW IN "THE SUNDAY TIMES," BERLUSCONI SAID THAT THE RRF
SHOULD WORK IN COOPERATION WITH NATO BUT BE COMPLETELY
AUTONOMOUS. MARTINO MAY HEAR MORE ON THE SUBJECT FROM HIS EU
COUNTERPARTS AT THE INFORMAL DEFENSE MINISTERS' MEETING
SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 22-23 IN SARAGOSA. END COMMENT.
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